

Restraint

by Minstrel of the Mint

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Summary: The path of a warrior is a lonely one, but this doesn't mean that Saito can't watch the cherry blossoms along the way.

SaitoXChizuru love fest, dedicated to cobaltopia.

Restraint

Due to procrastination/technology circumstances, I haven't posted anything in years. BUT FINALLY, I have the tools and the will to write again! :D For any faithful fans out there, you can thank my friend Tiffany, also known as cobaltopia. She's honestly more Asian than I'll ever be, and a much better friend than I'll ever deserve! She also helped me win a state-wide contest for young writers and such (WV Young Writers Competition), and were it not for her, I wouldn't have gotten as far as I did.

Anyhoo, to kick off this grand event, I thought I'd post a story in her honor: a Hakuoki fic, which is a new-ish video-game novel that we both fell in love with during the late winter. (She also introduced me to the whole thing, so thank her again and again)

Since this is already a video-game novel, I hope I don't get in any copyright trouble, so... DISCLAIMER POKEMON, I CHOOSE YOU!

WHOOSH, SPARKLE SPARKLE DISCLAIM!

Use your disclaimer attack! (this will be my new thing.
^_^)

MINSTREL OF THE MINT DOES NOT OWN HAKUOKI ~DEMON OF THE FLEETING BLOSSOM~; THIS STORY IS MERELY FOR ENTERTAINMENT PURPOSES. Nor do I own Pokemon. (T-T) epic sadness washing over me.

* * *

><p>M&N Publishing

****proudly presents...****

****Restraint****

* * *

><p>"How could you do this to us? We've been together for so long!"<p>

Heisuke and I stopped at the outside of the courtyard. I could hear Chizuru's frantic footsteps following after us the moment we left the building; a quick, jogging pace, perhaps slipping on her awkward footing at one time along the way. She was a clumsy woman, no doubt. Her companionship would surely be missed by Toudou. For some reason, this thought brought a sinking feeling to my chest, engulfing my heart in a quicksand of some unknown emotion.

She caught up and stood very close behind us... I could practically feel her ragged breath on my shoulders. This made me uncomfortable, so I remained silent.

"And now you're just going to abandon us...?" Her voice was low, dangerous... full of pain and hurt.

My companion and I turned to face her, Heisuke's face brimming with irritation and distress.

"Please..." Heisuke said, holding the hilt of his sword tightly, keeping his eyes away from her soft golden orbs. "Don't say that... This is hard for us too, all right?"

Chizuru's face softened at his words, the look in her eyes reflecting the pain that the man next to me felt in his heart. Her lips formed a small O shape, her body loosening from any means of lecture she was prepared to give us.

Heisuke held his hilt until his knuckles turned white, then gave Chizuru a quick, saddening glance. "No, no, I'm sorry." He turned around and began jogging to the gate of the courtyard. "See you!" He called to us, without looking back.

My chest puffed a little. He had left without me, and left the girl out to dry. I scoffed to myself. He'll just hide in a tree until I catch up with him, then we'll continue on our way. It wouldn't be a journey without an episode from him... But still... My fingers tingled from the very idea of their words.

Leaving the girl behind...

My feet somehow began to feel heavy, unable to pull my body away from Chizuru's big, tearful eyes, gazing out to the empty horizon. I have always been one that could read people by their eyes...

She longed for the return of Heisuke, to fall to her knees and blubber out an apology into his arms, and he would do the same. They would embrace before me, taking in each other's smells to remember their lingering scent... She would be pouring out tears into his shoulder, and he would stroke her hair, by some means of comfort to

her... and to himself.

They would take in each other's memory, and leave me to watch.

Something coiled tightly around the inside of my stomach.

Immediately, my first intention was to pull her close to me. To make her forget all her woes that she brought to this place, the horrors she witnessed by our blades and all curses spoken between bickering men, young and old. She was only a child. An innocent child looking for her father... She deserved so much better than a world that only knows that numb feeling when confronted with pain.

My next intention was to run. To pick her up and run. Far, far away, to a place where death is uncommon and life prospers quickly and beautifully enough for her... and lots of flowers. She'd enjoy that. And she probably didn't know I could play the flute... I'd retire my sword and play for her once in a while... when she would come back from picking flowers for her table when she ate breakfast in the morning.

How quickly this image played inside my mind.. How quickly my own imagination would betray the Shinsengumi... I almost choked.

She gave me a strange look, and I ignored her.

The wind picked up and carried blossom petals from the trees and into her hair, drifting past her face, and her ever pleading eyes. She looked at me more, begging for something; anything that would give her a comfort I couldn't provide.

"Yukimura-chan..." I began, searching for words that simply did not exist. "Please don't be sad."

Pink blossoms danced around our bodies, still falling after many heart-wrenching moments of silence. Chizuru could no longer look me in the eye, a rather disappointing thing, and stared at the ground, clenching her hands together in front of her chest as if she were holding her heart together.

I could never explain how much regret filled my being at that moment.

Regret?

I've killed hundreds of men... watched my companions, my friends, the few people in this world I could trust, slowly wither away... I've watched countless homes burn to the ground... I can't ever take back a swing of my blade; undo the things I've done to this land. The process was difficult, becoming truly apathetic to the unspeakable: a facade had to be made, followed by many nights of inner turmoil and suffering... Then, denial, plus thousands of excuses to make any situation bearable when I tried to sleep. One excuse became more convincing than the last, until my way of life was created:

'Follow orders, and do what must be done.'

And for the longest time, I've never felt any regret. Remorse could

not be tolerated as a warrior; nothing should hold me back from doing what must be done.

But looking at this girl... A simple girl, looking for her father in a strange land, with the most longing eyes... She made me forget everything.

"Ch-Chizuru..." I managed to say.

She didn't look up at me. I suppose she couldn't hear me over her own sobbing.

Another steady breeze shook the cherry blossoms of their flowers, and I held out my hand, allowing a perfect blossom to land in my palm. Such irony, that something as gentle as a cherry blossom could rest within the reach of a killer.

"I enjoy this time of year..." I told her, lowering my hand into her line of vision. "It is a time for life to prosper, and be free from the harshness of winter once again."

Chizuru sniffled and looked up at me: honey brown eyes, glimmering with tears. I would certainly miss those eyes.

"With winter, everything dies... there is so little life to be found anywhere," I went on, my heart sinking with every word. "There is hardly any hope for anything."

I used my free hand to tilt her chin up, and steadily placed the blossom behind her ear. Her eyes widened with surprise and blinked away her tears, and I could see right into her. Perfect.

"In spring, people have hope. Life grows all around people, and the cherry blossoms dance in the wind." The breeze blew a stray hair in front of her face, and I carefully tucked it back into place, attempting not to disturb the flower. "It's a beautiful time of the year."

Her face burned pink at her cheeks, and I noticed that my hand was lingering at her neck.

I didn't pull away.

"It is no time to be sad."

She stared up at me with a flushed face, stunned by my touch, and her image was burned into my memory.

"Oi, Saito!" I heard from above my head.

I had been walking for some time and perhaps made it a few miles away from the headquarters. By that time the forest started to thicken around me, and the roads to town became narrow and ill pampered with messy bushes lining the road, miles away from any civilization willing to care for it.

I looked up and saw Heisuke sitting atop a branch, his sword belt taken off of his waist, though he held on firmly to the hilt with both hands, just as when he ran off. I saw remains of berry seeds at my feet, right underneath where Heisuke was perched, some of them cut

in half, chewed and spit out, and come crushed and tossed aside.

"Sorry about the mess," he said, "You took longer than I expected."

"Expected?" I said, keeping my eyes on him as he jumped down to join me.

"Well, yeah. Your 'good-byes' don't ever really last that long." He used his foot to sweep the berry seeds off of the road and into the grass. "And if they do, it's normally because you want to double-check mission requirements or something."

I began walking at a swift pace, leaving a confused Heisuke a few feet behind me. "Your point?"

"You said good-bye to Chizuru, didn't you?" he asked me, his voice beginning to waver.

"I said what I had to say to her." I told him, keeping my own voice calm.

He sped up and started walking beside me, keeping his head down and both hands on his sword. "She's a wonderful woman..." My body stiffened when he said this. "She will make a fine bride to a lucky man one day." I began to clench my jaw. "I wish I could love her..."

I raised an eyebrow, but didn't look at him and kept my pace. "Why wish?"

He let out a bitter scoff. "You should know better than anyone."

I glanced towards him out of the corner of my eye, his eyes staring blankly at the road before him, his mouth forming a ghost of a smirk.

"I suppose it's a cursed life we choose to live... as warriors, I mean. We begin with the idea that we'll become heroes, killing off bad guys and making the world a better place, then we go back home to our families and eat dinner, as if nothing happened... as if nothing changed." His voice softened.

"We don't think about death as something... permanent. It's not until the first time we take someone's life that we truly think about what we've done. We ended someone's life. They once had childhoods, friends, and lovers... families to go home to once the day was done. We imagine what could've happened if they made it home... back to their own children and wives, perhaps? To a sick mother, who only committed felonies to pay for her medicine?"

I slowed my pace ever so slightly.

"We learn to live with it, though. We try to keep in mind the very idea we started out with: we made the world a better place. But in the back of our minds we know we would never want this done to us..." He bitterly scoffed again. "So we try to ignore it; ignore the thought of a woman we could be with and make love to, the thought of children who expect their fathers to return home every evening with a

smile on his face.

"We know we can't ever afford this luxury, because if we kill, others will attempt to kill us... It's a never-ending cycle of orders and vengeance and bloody death."

I sighed, letting every word of his truth swim around in my mind, allowing my inner pain to have a face I can recognize it by.

"A girl like Chizuru isn't meant for a life anywhere close to this kind. And it simply infuriates me that her own father would risk her life..." Heisuke went on, his tone becoming louder and sharper. "Why would any man, in his right mind, do this?"

"I'm not sure, Heisuke..." I told him. "But when we find him, I'll be sure to find out."

* * *

><p>My first story in years... finally done. I know that the interaction between Saito and Chizuru isn't right, but I never really got around to figuring out what they said. And besides, this is fanfiction, they can say whatever I want. (as long as I make sure the disclaimer is somewhere on the page)<p>

This is basically my interpretation of what happened between them... y'know, inside my head... 'cause I know there was a cherry blossom thing in there somewhere. I just thought I'd go a little more in-depth of what Saito could've been thinking.

Thank you so much for reading! Please review if you want, no flames, and dinosaurs shall roam the earth once more! Until next time!

End
file.